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SUBJECT: ORBAN IN SLOVAKIA: FOMENTS FEARS ABOUT INTENTIONS

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¶1. Summary: Victor Orban, Chairman of Hungary's Fidesz (Hungarian Civic Union) party was a guest speaker at the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) convention on Saturday, October 17, in Rimavska Sobota, Eastern Slovakia. Orban provoked the consternation of many in Slovakia by alluding to autonomy for the ethnic Hungarian communities living outside of Hungary. Orban's participation is widely seen here both as his own pre-election posturing as well as a ploy by SMK leadership (especially Chairman Pal Csaky) to shore up ethnic-Hungarian support in anticipation of next June's national elections at a time where SMK's polling numbers are dangerously close to the five percent minimum for parliamentary representation. End Summary.

¶2. In his October 17 address to the SMK convention, Victor Orban called on ethnic-Hungarians living in Slovakia to acknowledge their Hungarian descent "even at times when it brings no benefits," and urged the Hungarian minority not to succumb to nationalistic pressure in Slovakia. Orban stated that "Hungarians living here in the Carpathian Basin, should also view [them]selves behind borders not as a minority, but as a nation-forming community." Orban also said that "every ethnic community has certain rights" and "every community has the right to autonomy, which is a widely accepted European value."

¶3. Orban praised SMK leaders for their attendance at the Forum of MPs of the Carpathian Basin, and said that "everybody in Hungary will be pleased if you take part. Hungary is sending a message to you - Hungary is with you, Hungary is with Felvidek." (Note: Felvidek is the Hungarian word for the "uplands" used during the Habsburg dual monarchy prior to 1918 for most of the territory which is now Slovakia.)

¶4. Orban's visit prompted widespread criticism from all non-Hungarian elements of the Slovak political spectrum. Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU) Chairman Mikulas Dzurinda said that "I don't know any normal person who wouldn't think that the borders after WWII are inviolable. This only underlines how stupid and ridiculous Orban's dream is." Interior Minister and influential SMER politician Robert Kalinak opined that Orban's goal in addressing the SMK convention was to deliberately incite them and that "it's no good continuing in a dialogue on Slovak-Hungarian relations in a paranoid fashion." Slovak National Party Chairman Jan Slota called Orban's visit "dangerous" and said it is obvious Orban is "emphasizing the unity of the Hungarian nation in a single political group, which is supposed to begin with political autonomy of the territories of the countries neighboring Hungary."

¶5. Furthermore, on Monday, October 19, just two days after Orban's visit, PM Robert Fico said Slovakia will either veto Czech President Klaus's proposal for a Czech exemption from the Treaty of Lisbon vis-a-vis the Benes Decrees or insist the same exemption applies to Slovakia. "If we don't do that, I can foresee immediate attempts to attack the Benes Decrees that would entail less political protection than that enjoyed in the Czech Republic," Fico noted. In Slovakia, the Benes Decrees are identified with the expulsion of ethnic-Hungarians and the confiscation of their property post-WWII for their alleged collaboration with the Nazis.

¶6. SMK Chairman Csaky attempted to downplay Orban's controversial statements and said that Orban came to Slovakia on friendly terms and was merely discussing European norms for minority life. In a Median poll conducted in September and released on October 19, neither SMK nor Most-Hid ("Bridge"), the newly formed ethnic-Hungarian party which splintered off from SMK earlier this year, have enough support to gain entrance into Parliament. Five percent of the vote is required; SMK received 4.6 percent and Most-Hid received 3.1 percent.

¶7. Embassy Bratislava Comment: Orban's visit to Slovakia is just another volley across the net in the ping pong match we are watching here in the run-up to Slovak and Hungarian national elections. We agree with Dzurinda's assessment that "Many a time it seems to me that Slota needs Csaky, and the other way round, so that they can really make things worse, and sometimes Csaky needs Orban. It's hopeless unperspective politics." Unfortunately, stirring the nationalist pot seems easier for

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these politicians than addressing the truly pressing issues of economic recovery, corruption, and real minority integration. "Nation-building" and references to "Felvidek" is exactly the sort of language that causes even the most open-minded Slovaks to fear that Orban and Fidesz will challenge the status quo. End comment.

¶8. Embassy Budapest Comment: While all Hungarian dailies covered Orban's visit and his comments, including "the Slovak Language Act is a cultural aggression against European values," there have yet to be editorials addressing his visit. Interestingly, Fidesz introduced a legislative proposal on October 19 that would amend the current citizenship law to eliminate the requirement for an ethnic Hungarian to physically live in Hungary to obtain citizenship. While unlikely that this proposal will garner enough support for passage, it will most likely further ratchet up Slovak fears of a Fidesz government coming to power next spring. End comment.

¶9. This message was coordinated with Embassy Budapest.  
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